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Nonprofit Strategies



SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Beating Your Drum Without Tooting Your Horn

By Barry VanderKelen

Often people say to nonprofits, “You’re the best kept secret!” Why does this happen so frequently?

I spoke about this with Mary Verdin, founder of Verdin Marketing Ink, a San Luis Obispo-based marketing and public relations firm.

“Publicity and exposure are beneficial to nonprofits,” Verdin said. “But many nonprofits’ leaders are more comfortable serving others rather than drawing attention to themselves. It may seem self-serving to promote the organization’s good work.”

It’s hard for people to learn about the organization without promotion and publicity, however. What are some tips for board members and staff to

promote the organization without coming across as bragging?

“One of the most effective ways is to be able to deliver your message succinctly,” Verdin said. “Imagine being on an elevator having to state your organization’s purpose in the time it takes to travel three floors. Such a brief time frame forces the focus to be on purpose, need and outcome; there’s no time to inflate or hype the organization.”

Verdin likens this to “beating your drum without tooting your horn.”

She says, “Finding ways to get your core message out in a consistent way, on an ongoing basis is what beating your drum is about. It requires everyone in the organization to stay focused on purpose, need

and outcome. The more people involved in spreading the word, the better.”

Verdin adds that word-of-mouth marketing is one of the most powerful tools any organization has to use. The more people hear about your organization from friends, peers and colleagues, the more receptive they are to your message.

Other marketing tools such as paid advertising, printed materials, and social media have a role to play. Staying focused on purpose, need and outcome will allow each tool to be used properly to promote your organization.

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Resource Use

- Support nonprofit leadership
- Board development/training
- Strategic planning

Nonprofit Business Column of The Tribune

The San Luis Obispo Tribune publishes a column every other week in the Business section dedicated to the business practices of nonprofit orgs. Barry VanderKelen, Executive Director of the San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation writes the bi-

weekly column to help strengthen nonprofit organizations in the community. Each column is reprinted here as a one-page handout for use by local organizations. Barry can be reached at 543-2323 or by e-mail at barry@sloccf.org.